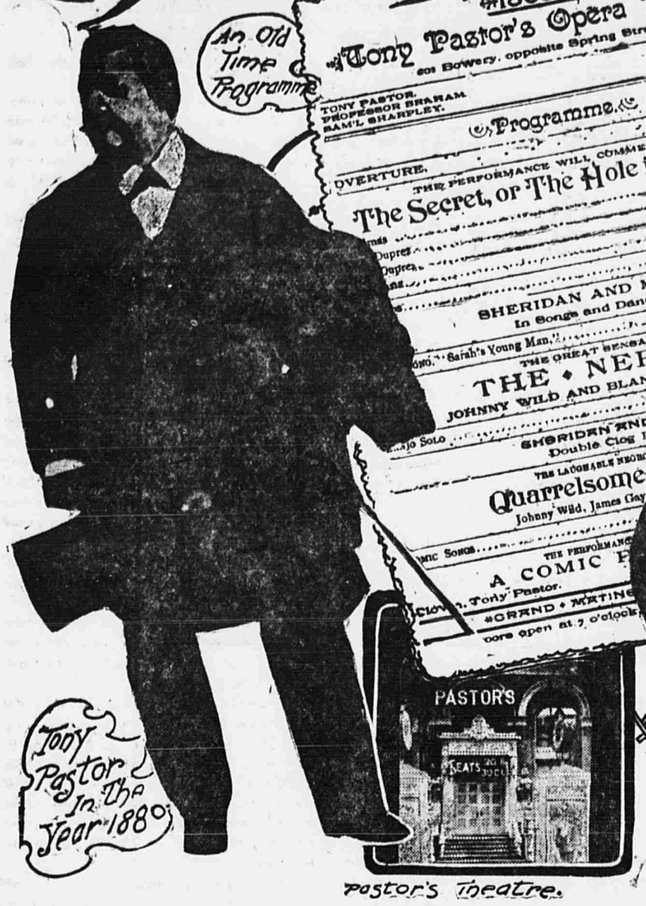
Chicot Interviews the Veteran Tony Pastor.



The Birth of Polite Vaudeville in the Bowery Forty Years Ago—Then Women First Patronized Variety Shows—The Big and Little Salaries of Long Ago—Some of Tony's Old Songs—Present Stars First Shone at 444 Broadway.

WHILE Tony Pastor still enjoys the fame of being the oldest living variety manager, his practical retirement from the stage about two years since deprives him of the dual honor of also being the oldest acting-actor Mr. Pastor's managerial career extends over a period of about thirty-eight years, during which time he has started upon their courses hundreds of actors of greater or less merit.

His career as a public performer dates back to 1843, when in the old Dey Street Church he sang duets with former State Senator Christian B. Woodruff at the meetings of the Hand-in-Hand Temperance Society.

The debutant was then six years of age, but had already evinced a marked predilection for the stage. To check this his father, who was a sort of solo violinist with the Grand Orchestra, sent him into the country to visit a farmer friend. Within a few weeks he was back with his father, the bearer of a note in which the farmer explained that young Pastor's impromptu performances seriously interfered with the work of his farm hands.

Seeing the impossibility of keeping his son from a stage career, the senior Pastor shortly afterward permitted him to appear at the old Barnum Museum as an infant prodigy.

"I felt all along," said Mr. Pastor, "that the theatrical field was to be the scene of my endeavors, and I really enjoyed my appearances at Barnum's. There was no Gerry Society in those days and my engagement here was practically unhampered.

"In 1847 I joined Raymond & Waring's Menagerie, appearing in burnt cork and playing on the tambourine end of a minstrel show. There was plenty of hard work, but I enjoyed it, and after this engagement gave out in the fall of that year I signed as an apprentice with John J. Nathan, then a well-known circuit manager. My circuit debut was made in the fall of 1847 at Welch's National Amphitheatre, Philadelphia. I rode in the entry, played juvenile parts in the after pieces, which were then made a feature of the performances, and also contributed an acrobatic specialty.

"The following summer was passed with Welch, Delevan & Nathan's Circus on the road, and it was here that I had my first taste of management at the age of twelve.

"In those days it was not customary for a circus to give a night performance, owing to the inadequacy of the lighting facilities. I organized a concert troupe among the circus people and gave night performances in school-houses and other places in the towns in which we showed. After a while the managers seemed to feel that I was diverting some of the money from their show to the concert feature, and by special request I temporarily retired from the managerial field.

"After that I went to the Federal Street Theatre in Boston, remaining until the tenting season. In 1851 the death of the ringmaster gave me an opportunity to wear the top boots, and in addition I served as vocalist, played the countryman in 'Pete Jenkins,' one of the old-time afterpieces, and danced 'Lucy Long' in the side shows. The following fall I was engaged as ringmaster of Bowers's Amphitheatre, also taking parts in dramas. The following spring I went out with Francois's Travelling Hippodrome, and in the winter I again appeared in New York as Bones with a minstrel show.

"The following spring I went with Mable's Circus as singing clown. In those days a singing clown was virtually the star of the performance and occupied a far more important position than he does to-day. It was part of the ringmaster's business to 'feed' the clown, who virtually offered both a monologue and what is now in stage parlance known as the 'cross talk' or 'sidewalk conversation.'

"The following year I went with Levi North's Circus as ringmaster and general performer, continuing with North in the fall at his Amphitheatre, Chicago. The following season I was on the road again with North and then turned my attention to New York, where I put my clowning experience to advantage as a comic singer. In passing I might say that I antedate George L. Fox (Humpty Dumpty).

"The approach of the Civil War determined me to stay in New York instead of trusting to the hazard of the road.

"Eighteen hundred and sixty-one found me at the famous old 'No. 444 Broadway,' and I remained there until 1865. I was one of the very first performers to feature 'The Star-Spangled Banner' and it was during this time that I virtually originated illustrated songs by employing a stereopticon in connection with my singing specialty. I had a large number of songs specially written for me, of which the best-known was probably the one with this chorus."

Mr. Pastor searched his memory and with the aid of Harry Sanderson, his business manager, finally recalled the lines of this chorus:

"'Tis only an old tattered piece of bunting,
'Tis only an old piece of rag;
But heroes have shed their best blood in its honor
And fondly we cherish that old tattered flag."

"I revived this with considerable success during the late Spanish-American war, singing it for several weeks. At that time it was quite the fashion to invite the audience to join in the chorus, and there were stirring scenes in the old concert hall.

"At that time the vaudeville houses were patronized almost exclusively by men. During my stay at 444 I studied the situation closely, and determined that if the women could also be induced to attend the patronage could be very materially extended. Men and boys alike smoked furiously throughout the performance and waiters patrolled the aisles hawking beer and stronger fluids.

"The result of my study encouraged me to abandon the circus profession and to unite my fortunes to those of Sam Sharpley, the minstrel manager, in the conduct of the old Volks Garden at No. 201 Bowery. This we changed into a cozy theatre and virtually instituted polite vaudeville as it is known to-day.

"Our investment, though comparatively small, was a large one for those days. Now millions of dollars are invested in vaudeville theatres alone.

"At the new house we made a special appeal to ladies, and after plenty of good, hard work on the part of my partner and myself we won the battle. Even in those early days we looked to England for special attractions, and among my earliest importations were James Taylor, then the greatest comic singer on the English stage, and Georgina Smithson, a serio-comic known as the Gainsborough Girl. This was about 1879—after I had opened my new theatre at No. 585 Broadway.

"This theatre served as the artistic birthplace of quite a number of well-known performers, and it was here that Nat Goodwin made his professional debut on Feb. 5, 1876.

"Lillian Russell also made her debut there, as did May Irwin, Sappho, once a very well-known comedian; the Hansel troupe, the first troupe of Tyrolese warblers; Florence Bindley, Gus Williams, Richard Carroll, then known simply as Little Dick;' Francis Wilson, who did a song and dance; Denman Thompson, who presented a rural sketch, 'Joshua Whitcomb,' from which 'The Old Homestead' was evolved (he made his debut, I recall, Nov. 12, 1876); 'Old Hoss' Hoey, Charles Evans, the French sisters, Minnie and Helena, who afterward married Evans and Hoey, and many others.

"The late Billy Barry presented his first negro monologue there; William J. Scanlon made his debut as an Irish comedian and Jennie Yeamans, Harry and John Kernell and the elder Pat Rooney all had their start in this theatre. It was here also that I presented my first condensed comic opera, an abbreviated version of 'Pinafore' being the first production.

"I moved to my present theatre in Tammany Hall in 1881, where Jennie Hill (who has never had an equal on the music hall stage as a comedienne) came over as a personal compliment. Vesta Tilley, Bessie Bellwood, Bessie Bonehill, the only Paquerette and Vesta Victoria were among those who played at this house during the 80s. Here also was introduced J. W. Kelley, the Rolling Mill man, the most original of the Irish comedians, and a host of others.

"During the latter part of my managerial career I also conducted a road company, appearing with them a part of the season and at my own house in the spring and fall. In 1885 my entire show of nine acts, together with the necessary officers, cost me $250, and were I able to duplicate that show to-day ten times that sum would not pay for the performers alone. In the old days, when I paid Billy Emerson, then in his prime, $75 a week, I was regarded as a spendthrift, and for years the $150 a week I paid John Thompson in '67 was the record-breaking price. At that you must remember that very frequently a performer appeared in the olio, played with the stock company and was seen again in the afterpiece. Now they work twenty minutes, twice a day.

"I have made it a rule not to speak definitely of the various salaries I have paid, but there are hundreds of actors, both in the vaudeville and legitimate fields, whose services I have secured for less than $50. Why, I can remember paying Sheridan and Mack, then one of the star attractions, $12.50 apiece.

"I suppose in my career I have memorized more than 1,500 songs, most of which I have forgotten. I often used to sing eight and ten songs a week and had to make frequent changes. One of the most popular of the old-time songs was 'Down in a Coal Mine,' the chorus of which used to run:

"'Down in a coal mine, underneath the ground,
Where no ray of sunshine ever can be found,
Digging dusky diamonds all the season round;
Down in a coal mine, underneath the ground.'

"Another very popular ditty used to be 'Sarah's Young Man,' which was sung to the air of 'Kitty of Coleraine' or 'Jenny Jones.' It told of a young man infatuated with a servant girl by the name of Sarah, whose love affair ran through seven verses of eight lines each. He finds her one day keeping company with a soldier, and a fight follows, in which the master's attention is attracted. He comes down stairs to investigate the row and finds him under the kitchen table. The last verse reads:

"'I gave to her master all due explanation,
He then let me go and thus ended my fright.
Miss Sarah, of course, she lost her situation,
And also her soldier, which served her quite right.
The last time we met she was full of regret
And said: "Oh, forgive me this once if you can!"
But, said I: "Oh, no; fools often fall between two stools."
And I'm happy I'm no longer Sarah's young man.'

"I sang my first parodies in 1850 and introduced medleys one year before that. Some of the same ideas I find in parodies of to-day, and hundreds of the current jokes are relics of fifty years ago. The oldest gag is the one referred to in The Evening World of last week about the chicken crossing the street. This was the first joke I ever heard, and I think Adam must have told it to Cain and Abel. To sum it all up, I have virtually been in the business from 1843 to 1903 and have watched vaudeville grow from a thing to be shunned to a thing sought after, and I expect to live to see it make greater strides yet."

And then Mr. Pastor excused himself and sprinted for the train to his summer home at Elmhurst, L. I., with all the alacrity of a youthful commuter.

CHICOT.

HER HEART'S DESIRE.

BY CHARLES GARVICE.

A ROMANCE OF LOVE, SHIPWRECK & FORTUNE.

By Permission of Geo. Munro's Sons.

CHAPTER I.

The Love of a Lord.

IF Decima Deane had not wandered into the inclosure about the lions' cages and lost her way returning this story might not have been written. But she did wander away from her aunt, Lady Pauline Lascelles, and Lord Gaunt found her. Or, rather, he was near when Decima, having got too near a young lion, was almost in the grasp of the fierce brute's claws and Lord Gaunt saved her. He would not show his arm, which bore the marks of the claws that had swiftly struck at her face, but led her away and helped her to find her aunt. Decima poured out her tale of adventure, but Lady Lascelles touched the girl's arm as an exhortation to silence, and addressed the gentleman.

"I am greatly obliged to you for your care of my niece, sir. I am afraid she has given you some trouble. To whom am I indebted?"

The gentleman frowned slightly, as if the question were an unwelcome one. From his cigarette case lying on the table he took a card and give it to her.

"That is my name," he said quietly.

Lady Lascelles started slightly as she crushed the card in her palm, her face flushing.

He bowed as if he understood, his lips set tight, the weary, listless look back in his eyes again.

"Decima, you are nothing more than a child—a mere child. You must never do such a thing again!"

"Why not? What harm have I done?" insisted the girl.

"It is—it is not usual; it is bad etiquette, manners, form, to walk about with a strange man; to take tea with him is worse. Any strange gentleman is bad enough; but that man of all men in the wide world!"

"Why was it worse to walk about and sit down to tea with him than any one else, aunt?" Decima asked.

Lady Lascelles bit her lip.

"Because—my dear girl, you would not understand"——

"But, aunt—why?"

"Because he is a bad, wicked man—one of the most wicked men in the world!"

And Decima was silenced at last.

Lord Gaunt had been a model nobleman until, travelling incognito as Edward Barnard in Switzerland, he met and married a scheming adventuress. He was soon disillusioned, but his view of life had undergone so terrible a change that he could not return to his old manner of living. There were tales of wild dissipation associated with his name, and equally, he was known as a traveller, a daring explorer. Morgan Thorpe, the brother of his wife, had tracked him down and had bargained with him for silence. For £1,000 a year Thorpe agreed not to tell the woman where to find her husband, nor his real name and rank.

Gaunt met Decima again at Leafmore. His estates gave the district its name and the little home of the Deanes was near his grander house. Decima's brother Bobby, intended for the army, was preparing for Sandhurst. Gaunt made Bobby his loyal friend and gradually an intimacy sprang up between the blase man of the world and the fresh, unspoiled, innocent girl that was almost as close and sweet as the love of brother and sister.

Scarcely knowing why, Gaunt abandoned the dissipations which had given him so evil a reputation, and led by the candid girl, devoted himself to the work of bettering the condition of his tenants. His agent, Bright, was made happy at last and threw himself into the work he had so long implored Gaunt to undertake with infectious enthusiasm.

Her father was a dreamer, an absent old man whose few remaining faculties were fixed upon his inventions. Theodore Mershon, who had made marvellous wealth as a promoter, said there was millions in one of Deane's inventions. He would form a company to exploit it and Deane found a new pleasure in life.

The Deanes dined with Mr. Mershon in his too-new palace. The dinner was endless and glaringly evident of its giver's wealth. Mershon's half-sister, Mrs. Sherborne, timid, fearful, presided at the table. She looked pityingly often at Decima when Mershon was not looking.

"What do you think of her?" Mershon demanded suddenly, as he stood with Mrs. Sherborne in the hall after their guests were gone.

"What do you think of her?" he demanded. "Isn't she beautiful, lovely? Is there any girl, woman, like her in all the world?"

"She—she is very beautiful, very sweet," she assented, under her breath.

Mr. Mershon laughed.

"I'm glad you think so," he said; "for I mean to make her my wife."

Bobby went up to London to finish his cramming for the examinations and Gaunt gave him the use of his chambers and the freedom of his club. It was like the fates to throw the young man into the hands of Morgan Thorpe and under the fascination of the adventuress sister. The harpies wove their net about him and fleeced him of the little he had in the brave delusion that because he lived so well on Gaunt's bounty he had Gaunt's wealth. The sister was known as Mrs. Dalton, and from her Thorpe sedulously concealed all knowledge of Bobby's relations with Gaunt, and yet used her as his willing accomplice in the fleecing of the youth.

And every day Gaunt was falling deeper in love with Decima. He had emerged from the shadow of his old trouble to come upon this greater sorrow—that he must love and be silent.

She was the most beautiful woman in Leafmore the night of his grand dinner. Simply clad, without jewels, her slight form and girlish beauty attracted more admiring glances than were bestowed on all the famed beauties gorgeously clad.

Mershon saw the sensation she made and did not need to be told that after that night his task would be difficult. He and Gaunt followed her with hungry eyes. Gaunt did not ask her to dance until late and then he must wait because Mershon had forestalled him.

The promoter found her tired and led her into a quiet nook, where, determining to force the issue, he told her of his love.

"Oh, stop—stop!" she said. Her voice was broken and faltered in her eagerness to stop him, to be saved one single word more. "I—I did not know. Indeed—indeed, I did not know. I never thought, never guessed. Oh, do—do believe me. You must believe me."

"If you don't hate or even dislike me, you can grow to like me," he said doggedly, with the persistence which had helped him to make his money. "I'm in no hurry. I don't want to hurry you. I'll give you time to think it over."

"I am sorry!" she said in a low, clear voice. "I must—I must—say no, a thousand times no! Will you—will you please find my father and tell him I would like to go home, Mr. Mershon?"

She sat like one in a dream. And thus Gaunt found her. She did not hear his step until he was close upon her; then she seemed to awake, and turned to him with an eagerness which made the blood rush to his heart.

"This is our dance," he said, simply. "Your partners—those whom you have deserted—are rending their hair; I am prepared to be rent also."

She rose without a word, and he led her to the ballroom.

Suddenly the room began to swim, the music grew to a roar in her ears, and the lights seemed to have been extinguished, as if a hand had passed over them.

He felt her sink on to his breast, felt the collapse, and, with all a strong man's self-possession, he carried her, apparently still dancing, toward the palm-house.

He bent his head until his lips touched hers. His own lips were hot with the fever of passion, and, as if their fire had warmed her back to life, she shuddered and opened her eyes.

For a moment there was no intelligence in them, then she saw and recognized him. A shiver ran through her, and, all unconsciously, her arms tightened round him.

"I—am—so—glad!" she murmured, unconsciously.

"So glad—dearest!" he whispered.

"Yes," she said, faintly. "I have been asleep—and dreaming, and—and I thought it was some one else. Have I fainted, Lord Gaunt?"

"Yes," he said, hoarsely, as he allowed her—and helped her—to stand upright.

With a great, a never to be described effort, he controlled himself.

"Good night and good-by," he said as he wrapped her tenderly in the carriage rugs.

She smiled at his solemnity: "Oh, you will see that to-morrow I'm all right!"

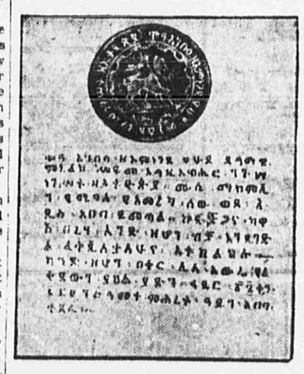
In the morning Bright told her that Lord Gaunt was gone.

"I fear that he will never come back to Leafmore," said Bright, in deep dejection.

(To Be Continued.)

This Story Will End Saturday.

A ROYAL PERMIT TO KILL.



This is not a laundry ticket, but a royal permit, signed and sealed by Emperor Menelik, of Abyssinia, granting the American explorer, McMillan, leave to hunt in Abyssinian domains. Here is a translation of the permit:

"The Lion of the Tribe of Judah hath conquered, Menelik II., the elect of God, King of Kings, of Ethiopia. An American gentleman, whose name is Mr. McMillan, is coming to Addis Abeba. I have given him permission to kill one elephant and to hunt and kill as much as he likes of the other wild animals in Jig Jiga and the Hawash Valley, therefore don't stop him. Written the 5th of December, 1902.—Ain-Ababa."

A POE MEMORIAL.

The building in which Edgar Allan Poe edited the Southern Literary Messenger in Richmond, Va., is still standing, and it is proposed to place a suitable commemorative tablet on its walls.

PETRIFIED SHIPS.

Alaskan Indians allege that up the Porcupine River, 1,500 miles from Port Yukon, there are two petrified ships lying stranded in the mountains.